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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000498

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EUR/NCE FOR ERIC FICHTE; EUR/UMB; EUR/ACE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BO](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECHS EXPAND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION EFFORTS IN  
BELARUS FOLLOWING THE FRAUDULENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: A. PRAGUE 00298

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 00222

[1](#)C. PRAGUE 00068

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Counselor  
Karen C. Reider for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Promoting democracy and human rights in Belarus remains a top foreign policy priority for the Czech government. Following the fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus in March 2006, the Czech Parliament voted to increase funding to support democracy promotion in Belarus from \$106,500 to over \$1 million. Czechs will focus on increasing access to independent media, supporting human rights, and providing financial assistance to those persecuted by the Lukashenko regime. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff met with Gabriela Dlouha, Director of Czech MFA's Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS), and Marek Toman, her deputy, to discuss TRANS projects in Belarus. Toman confirmed TRANS will spend 57% of its 2006 budget on nine projects to promote democracy and human rights in Belarus, reflecting the GOCR's foreign policy emphasis on Belarus. (In total, TRANS will fund 19 democracy promotion projects this year in Belarus, Cuba, Iraq, Burma, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Balkans.)

[1](#)3. (C) Toman confirmed that following the fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus, the Czech Parliament responded by voting to increase funding for TRANS projects in Belarus by \$898,000, from \$106,500 to over \$1 million. According to Dlouha, the primary goals of Czech democracy promotion in Belarus are to (1) increase access to independent media, (2) support defenders of human rights (including the pro-democracy opposition), and (3) provide financial support to people persecuted by the Lukashenko regime.

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Goal 1: Increase Independent Media  
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[1](#)4. (C) Remembering their own successful experience with Radio Free Europe, the Czechs remain committed to increasing access to independent media and information in Belarus. Specific projects include:

-- Increase previous financial commitments in support of European Radio for Belarus (ERB), the independent radio

project launched in cooperation with the USG;

-- Support independent newspapers by purchasing advertising in (1) "Narondnaja Volja," an independent newspaper published in Russia and distributed in Belarus, and (2) "Arche," an independent foreign affairs journal. Dlouha said the advantage of this approach is that it provides financial support for the newspaper, yet is safe and legal.

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Goal 2: Support Human Rights  
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15. (C) TRANS will fund several projects that support human rights defenders and the pro-democracy opposition in Belarus. These projects are intended to create support in Belarusian society for human rights, persuade people not to be afraid to participate in demonstrations for human rights, build grassroots capacity for political opposition groups, and provide support for the elected opposition (e.g., local deputies who are elected on a pro-democracy platform). Dlouha explained that the Czech government believes local elections next year in Belarus may provide an opportunity for the opposition to occupy more of the political landscape. Specific projects include:

-- Financial support for Viasna, a human rights organization based in Belarus. Viasna cooperates with Czech NGO People in Need (PIN) to support civil society. The support includes both capacity building training and material support, such as providing the copy machines requested by opposition leaders.

-- Training for local Belarusian deputies on the principles of democratic self-governance. PIN and the Czech Union of Towns and Villages provide the training in the Czech Republic and Belarus.

-- Teaching the Czech transformation experience to future Belarusian opposition leaders. For example, TRANS has funded a transition simulation called "Talking to Power," which will be taught to five to ten Belarusian dissidents this summer by former Czech student dissident, Vaclav Bartuska, now a professor at New York University in Prague.

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Goal 3: Help the Persecuted  
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16. (C) TRANS will also provide assistance to those persecuted by the Lukashenko regime. Specific projects include:

-- Stipends for students who have been expelled from Belarusian universities because of their political beliefs. The stipends will cover expenses for up to six months of study at a Czech university.

-- Financial support for people persecuted by the regime. This includes payment for legal or medical assistance needed by the people who were beaten or arrested in connection with the protests following the election.

17. (C) Comment. Czechs deserve recognition for their leadership in supporting democracy in Belarus. In addition to the innovative programs described above, the Czechs have demonstrated their commitment to Belarusians by consistently advocating for a strong transatlantic approach to Lukashenko. They were among the first to recognize and support Alexander Milinkevich after his election as the common opposition presidential candidate. They were among the first to call for sanctions following the fraudulent elections. They have enthusiastically supported ERB from the beginning. And they hosted a Council of Europe Conference in February 2006 to offer members of Milinkevich's common opposition party the opportunity to confer with parliamentarians, NGOs and diplomats from the EU (refs A-C).  
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